

Dec. 1982
DEC.

BROADCAST

THE STORY OF A RECORD.

The Vocalion Gramophone Co. Ltd. came into existence in 1925 by acquiring the record and gramophone business of the Aeolian Co. Ltd. of Bond Street, the business and patents of World Record Ltd. of Mortlake and the record factory of the Universal Music Co. Ltd. at Hayes, Middlesex. For the next two and a half years this new company kept the Aco records on the market and continued the Aeolian Vocalion repertoire under the new name 'Vocalion'. For a short time they produced some more World records under the new name of Vocalion Long Playing Records (these were originally going to be called Vocalion Four-in-One). There was also sub-contract work and records made in this way included Beltona, Scala and Woolworth's 'Little Marvel'.

With added facilities at the Hayes factory, production increased by 60% during the first year, in spite of the un-looked for innovation of electrical recording from both Columbia and HMV. Vocalion did not meet this until April 1926, when they took a five-year exclusive licence with Marconi's Wireless Telegraph Co. Ltd. to use its electrical recording system. In May 1927 a daughter company was formed in Australia at Richmond, Melbourne, and this firm took over the production of Vocalion records formerly pressed by others.

With profits down by almost a half during its second year of trading, the Vocalion company took the decision to abandon the manufacture of 10-inch and 12-inch discs and to concentrate their efforts on a new 8-inch record with a finer groove pitch, which would play as long as a 10-inch disc. Thus in June 1927 the Broadcast records were launched.

The introduction of this record caused the biggest upset in the trade since Columbia and HMV had put out the Phoenix and Cinch records at 1s. 1d. in September 1913. The Gramophone Dealers Association resolved that "The same constitutes a menace to the legitimate retail trade": the records were priced at only 1s. 3d. and the trade papers condemned the disc out of hand and would not accept advertisements or publish release data. Dealers were recommended from all sides not to handle this "undesirable record".

Another bone of contention for the established trade was the type of channel through which the new disc was being sold: chain stores, cheap bazaars, stationers like H. Smith and even cash chemists such as Boots. To crown it all, the Co-operative Societies were taking the recordings under their own exclusive label, which the dealers abhorred as the dividends which the societies paid to their customers amounted to price cutting, an activity legally discouraged by record manufacturers.

At 1s. 3d. and with a three-minute playing time, the Broadcast record had found a market. The demand quickly outstripped the Hayes factory's capacity. Dealers soon saw that the rapid turnover more than made up for the smaller profit margin

and began to stock them.

One of the consequences of the demise of the Aco and Vocalion records after July 1927 was the disappearance of most of the sub-contract work: only Beltona, Linguaphone, Duophone, National Gramophonic Society and Homophone continued with other makers.

More equipment, valued at £20,000, was installed at the Hayes factory where overtime working and night shifts became necessary, for between one and one-and-a-quarter million discs were being made per month. The 10s. shares were being quoted as high as 50s., although no dividend had been paid the previous year, when the standard size records were in production. Stockbrokers were now estimating profits from the Broadcast to be 100,000 per annum. By the end of January 1928 the plant's capacity had been increased by 50%. The Broadcast record was put on sale in Australia in the same month, but was there priced at 2s.

The first real competition to the Broadcast record came in March 1928 with the Edison Bell Radio disc, of the same diameter and price.

So great was the demand for Broadcasts from overseas countries that a subsidiary company was thought necessary, and Vocalion (Foreign) Ltd. was formed in March 1928 with offices in King Street, St. James's, where the parent company was installed (having moved from its original Regent Street headquarters). The new company acquired the leasehold factory in Melbourne and all the stocks of records and matrices including the former Aco and Vocalion material. It had the right to sell throughout the world except for the U.K., the Irish Free State, the U.S.A. and Canada, and Russia. They guaranteed to sell one-and-a-quarter million records in France and Belgium and to fulfill a contract to supply one million records to West Africa. The parent company was committed to help in the supply of records and to this end further installations were made at the Hayes factory in order to meet a guarantee of three million records to Vocalion (Foreign) Ltd.

The Australian factory had recently been equipped with the latest presses for 8-inch, 10-inch and 12-inch discs from British and American makers, and a refrigerating plant to cool the water coming from the presses. Four million discs per annum were expected from the Richmond factory and all had been contracted for.

Vocalion (Foreign) Ltd. had requests for sales or manufacturing agencies from 39 different countries and net earnings of £55,000 were expected after the payment of royalties, including one of 3% for the Marconi recording process. The sum of £40,000 was paid to the Vocalion Gramophone Co. Ltd. for this part of its business plus 40,000 fully paid up shares; the shares on offer to the public were over-subscribed by fifteen times the total on offer. The new company also had the use of factories in Belgium, France and Germany.

A tentative offer had been made for ten million Broadcasts which, it was hoped, would come from a factory to be erected in Burmah: this was to be its annual output.



Some day, Roy Plomley, I'm
going to get you for this !

CHIV
By June 1928 Broadcasts were selling in China, Italy and France (where W. H. Smith had the sales agency).

As in the U. K. there was opposition to the Broadcast discs in Australia. Brunswick, Columbia, HMV and Parlophone interests decided on concerted action against the new competition and jobbers and dealers began pledging themselves not to handle the line.

It was a different story in the U. K. by then, for over 1000 HMV dealers were stocking Broadcasts. Despite criticism for rapid wear on the innermost grooves, the records were selling very well, especially those for dancing. Over £100,000 profit was made in the third year of trading.

Exactly one year after discontinuing 10-inch records, Vocalion re-introduced the size with the Broadcast Twelve, so called because it was projected to play as long as a 12-inch disc. It had a blue label, a 5000 catalogue series and a price of 2s.

In Australia the Broadcast was an undoubted success and HMV was forecasting an adverse effect on its own sales, although dealers were said to be finding new customers for HMV among those who had begun with Broadcast. And the continuing success of the records in Britain was reflected in the fact that, by September 1928, 50% of HMV dealers were stocking Broadcast. Marks and Spencer were selling 90,000 a week and Boots had sold a million during the previous twelve months. In the next month, further competition for the 1/3d. record came with the new 10-inch Dominion Record at the same price.

No profits were being made by Vocalion (Foreign). In Belgium it had joined forces with the Chantal company of Ghent, forming Vocalion-Chantal S. A. Another company was formed in Germany, called Orchestrola-Vocalion G. m. b. H., a combination of Clausophon A. G. and the associated Adler Phonograph A. G. businesses with factories in Berlin and Thalheim. Imported Broadcasts and home-recorded German artists were put on sale in both sizes of discs. As in Britain and Australia, retaliation ensued from the competition and the Columbia-controlled Lindström company and the Polyphonmusikwerke began producing their own brands of cheap record.

Both sizes of Broadcast were being sold in Spain, where it was reported that the popular Sardanas and Zarzuelas were to be recorded, and that a survey was being made for the erection of a factory. The records were on sale in Vienna and in France, where the new Vocalion (France) company had taken over from W. H. Smith and was re-formed as the Société Anonyme Disques Broadcast at Boulevard Hausmann in Paris. Broadcasts were also selling in Bombay and Calcutta.

A new company formed in June 1928, Picture Gramophone Records Ltd. was also supplied with 8-inch master recordings by Vocalion, which were limited to not more than 25 titles a month: this company's business was taken over by the Goodson Gramophone Record Co. Ltd. in December. It was in that same month that the small X-prefixed Broadcast discs were introduced. (The 8-inch size had already been

plemented by a Scottish series with 'S' prefixed numbering.) The Inner Circle of the London Underground had now installed kiosks on some of its stations which played Broadcast records for the delight of passengers.

The French company's factory was expected to be in production in January 1929, Belgian factory, in spite of losses, had been modernised, and the Melbourne factory had augmented its output.

Woolworth's, who had been supplied with Vocalion's Little Marvel records until September 1928, had taken on the Victory records made for them by Crystalate. Vocalion accordingly introduced its own labelled 6-inch discs in February 1929, known as Junior Broadcast. There were eighteen discs in the first issues, with a prefixed catalogue number; they were described as 'Super Six' records. The 8-inch Broadcasts were now experiencing reduced sales due to the established competition of Radio records and the 10-inch Dominions. A further set-back was Marks Spencer's decision, in April 1929, to stock the 10-inch Imperials instead of Broadcasts.

In July 1929 the new Broadcast Super Twelve Dance records were announced, to be at 2s., although when they went on sale in September the price was only 1s. 6d. The 10-inch records had a 2,500 catalogue series and, mainly, orange labels.

At the same time, Vocalion had been investing in other companies, much to its detriment. One such company was the British Automatic Gramophone Co. Ltd., which held a licence from an American company to manufacture automatic selecting gramophones, which could play up to twenty selections, by choice, of 10-inch double-sided records, with needles changed automatically, and could be hand-operated or electrically operated.

Another venture was to take a controlling interest in Brownlac Ltd., makers of Brownlac, a synthetic substitute for shellac discovered by a Mr. Brownlow. The factory was at St. Margarets, Twickenham. Brownlac was supposedly satisfactory for Vocalion's record manufacture in experiments, but it proved a dismal failure when tried on a production run. A controlling interest was also taken in the Vincent Manufacturing Co. Ltd., which itself controlled the piano business of Rogers and Hammerstein. The responsibility for all these investments appears to have rested with Mr. Knevyl Sugden, the Managing Director of the Vocalion companies.

September 1929 also saw Boots giving up Broadcast but Tommothy Whites, the other chemists, took them on for the first time. The word 'Broadcast' was belatedly registered as a registered trade mark, claiming usage as from July 1927 (it was registered in April 1930). The Talking Machine News began mentioning the discs, partly on the strength of the two 10-inch series, which 'legitimised' the 8-inch series. No qualms had been felt over Edison Bell's Radios when they had appeared.

A £250,000 share capital of the company was increased by a further £100,000

after the A. G. M. of 1927 to enable the enterprise to enter the loudspeaker market and to make disc recordings for the cinema trade. A portable recording machine had been acquired for the purpose (the company already had a mobile recording unit) and the first recordings had been taken at the Grand Hotel, Eastbourne.

Although the parent company showed a profit of nearly £117,000, Vocalion (Foreign) was showing a loss of £16,000 since trading had begun in April 1928. In November 1929 the companies moved their offices back to Regent Street, at No. 227, and Managing Director Sugden was obliged to go to Australia to reorganise the business there. After two years of 40% dividends, at the 1930 A. G. M. there was not enough profit for any dividend to be paid. Reasons given for the poor results were the increase in royalties to composers, the depreciation of the company's investments elsewhere, the expenditure on experimental ventures (especially the 16-inch film discs) and the highly competitive nature of the business during the earlier part of the financial year. This last had since been largely overcome. The 10s. shares were being quoted at 6s.

In September 1930 the Managing Director lost his position and was also dismissed, or resigned, from the Boards of the associated companies. A new Board of Directors was advised that it might have a claim against Sugden. One third of the companies' assets were tied up in companies which showed little sign of profitability, thus immobilising the company's liquid resources. Brownlac had closed its factory and British Automatic Gramophones was in difficulties. By July 1930 Vocalion (Foreign) had a total loss of £31,000 and its directors were working without remuneration. The Australian subsidiary was sold off to a local company called Vocalion (Australia) Ltd., for £65,000, only £5,000 being in cash.

The above article, which will be concluded in our next issue, formed the subject of Frank Andrews' talk to the Society at the June Meeting at the Bloomsbury Institute. The talk was illustrated by slides and tape recordings of Broadcast records.

Members' attention is drawn to changes announced at the A. G. M., whereby all information for the Almanac should now be sent to Dave Roberts, and all Regional Reports to Mike Field (address in the A. G. M. report in this issue).

Members are asked also to remember to enclose a stamped addressed envelope with any letter to an Officer requiring a reply. It saves delays (and postage expenses to the Society) if letters are addressed to the right person; only articles for the magazine should be sent to the Editor, for example. The membership records, and despatch of the magazine, are in the capable hands of the Secretary, Dave Roberts, and all enquiries, changes of address etc. should be sent to him, NOT TO THE EDITOR.

Finally, the Officers and Committee of the Society would like to extend to all Members the Compliments of the Season and Wishes for good Hunting in the New Year.

Feb. 19¹⁹33

BROADCAST

STORY OF A RECORD.

Part 2

In March 1931, Vocalion stopped making its Broadcast Super Twelve Dance records (with orange labels), and a new 10-inch record was introduced, also allegedly with a playing duration equal to a 12-inch disc. This was labelled in scarlet and gold, and the Broadcast Super Twelve and given a catalogue series in a 3,000 block. As with all Broadcasts produced so far, were recorded under the Marconi emblem and bore the usual Min-a-circle symbol, although there were only eight months to go before the expiry of its exclusive licence. The new discs included the music recordings as part of a popular and varied repertoire. The records were priced at 1s. 6d. each and, at the same time, the 8-inch Broadcasts were reduced to 1s. each. (Edison Bell had reduced their Radio records to that amount in November 1930). The new recordings were broadcast weekly from Radio Toulouse in France, the Vocalion company having bought air time. In June the Company decided to have the word REX registered as a trade mark for gramophone records, and a second company to do so.

There were again no dividends for shareholders at the sixth A.G.M., although it was claimed that the demand for Broadcast records had been well maintained. Due to the poor financial position of Vocalion (Foreign) Ltd. the parent company resolved to reduce its claim of a royalty of £10,000 per annum to only £2,500.

In September 1931 the Broadcast record was increased in size to 9 inches, and Co-operative Societies' discs also increased as a matter of course. The price remained at 1s. for both. New recording studios were being installed at the former Wand School for Girls building at 53, Norland Square, Holland Park. The original studios at Duncan Avenue were to be abandoned. From October 1931, Norland Square became the registered office of the Vocalion Gramophone Co. Ltd.

After November 1931, the three types of Broadcast record then in production were to be recorded under a "New Electrical Process", and the encircled M and Marconi process legend disappeared from the labels. The new studios were in production by December 5th 1931.

At about this time, Vocalion petitioned the courts to have Vocalion (Foreign) Ltd. compulsorily wound up. The hearing took place on January 11th 1932, and the newspapers were intimating that the parent company might soon be taken over by the Crystalate Gramophone Record Manufacturing Co. Ltd. This was confirmed in March 1932.

NEW PROPRIETORS

Crystalate found it necessary to increase its capitalisation by the offer of two millions of shares in order to purchase Vocalion. The price was put at £64,000.

Upon acquisition, Crystalate stopped the blue-label Broadcast Twelve records.

The Vocalion Gramophone Co. Ltd. was to be voluntarily wound up by Crystalate and Percy Garrat, one of Vocalion's original directors, was appointed liquidator on April 12th. 1932. There was a proposal that a new company should be formed as Vocalion Gramophone (1932) Ltd., but in the meantime Crystalate kept the original name on the Broadcast and Broadcast Super Twelve labels which continued to come from the Hayes factory. Crystalate's own Imperial discs and the 8-inch Eclipses for Woolworth's were made at Tonbridge.

In May 1932 it was revealed that Vocalion (Foreign) Ltd's total deficiency was put at £49,195, with a shareholding deficiency of £209,286. No audited accounts had been made since June 1930 and failure of the business was ascribed to the failure of the Melbourne factory to achieve full productive capacity, to the world trade recession and the failure of the company's investments elsewhere.

Crystalate reduced the price of the Broadcast Super Twelve to 1s. 3d. each in June 1932. Brownlac Ltd. was put into voluntary liquidation in July 1932 by the liquidating Vocalion company, which itself was not wound up until April 1936.

By October 1932, the Hayes address was being omitted from the Broadcast Super Twelve labels, with Crystalate's City Road address in lieu but still under the Vocalion name.

BROADCAST INTERNATIONAL AND BROADCAST FOUR-TUNE.

In January 1933, Crystalate introduced two new types of Broadcast record. Of these, the Broadcast International had both scarlet and gold and black and gold labels, and was so called as the repertoire was drawn from matrices in America and Germany, where Crystalate had interests in record companies. The Broadcast Four-Tune had a fine groove pitch enabling five to six minutes' playing time to be accommodated on each side. This was employed to record two dance music tunes per side. Both these ten-inch records sold at 1s. 6d.

The 9-inch Broadcasts had their last supplement in August 1933 and the Broadcast Super Twelves began to carry the name of the Crystalate company around the edge of the labels. In September, the Rex record was introduced at 1s., as a replacement for the Broadcast.

March 1934 saw the last supplement of the Broadcast Super Twelve records; the 'B' prefixed International series had ceased one year earlier and the Broadcast Four Tune record had stopped in December 1933. (An enigmatic series, about which little is known, was the Broadcast Super Twelve Scottish series, with 'SC' prefixes. Frank Andrews would welcome full details of any known records in this series).

Under the Crystalate name Broadcast Super Twelve labels began to carry the legend concerning fixed prices and public performance prohibition.

(continued on
p. 150)

IMPERIAL BROADCAST

Crystalate introduced the Imperial-Broadcast record in March 1934. This was a 10-inch record with black and gold label, a 4,000 catalogue series and a price of 1s. 6d. It survived for less than a year, along with Imperial records, leaving Crystalate with only Rex and the Eclipse records being supplied to Woolworth's.

BROADCAST NEW SERIES

The Broadcast New Series discs were eight inches in diameter and priced at 6d. There were only twenty-eight issues, pressed mostly from Eclipse matrices, although a few of the former 8-inch Broadcast matrices were also employed. These were mentioned in "World's Fair" in August or September 1937, but may have been issued earlier. What would the trade have said about them in 1927 if they had been issued then at 6d! They appear to be the last disc with 'Broadcast' forming part of its name-style.